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Fraser E. West
July 18, 1994

Interview conducted by Daniel Martinez
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Interviewee: Fraser E. West
Military Rank: Commanding Officer George Company, 2nd Lt. of 3rd Marine Regiment
Interviewer: Daniel Martinez, Historian Hilton Hotel, Guam
Date: July 18, 1994

— 00:00:00 to 00:00:20- AUDIO DESCRIPTION
Fraser West is a Caucasian American man with bushy eyebrows, wearing a white cap with a number nine on a red and gold shield. He is also wearing a pastel colored plaid shirt. In the background is a white lamp and a beige wall.

— 00:00:56

Martinez: My name is Daniel Martinez with the National Park Service. I'm here at the Hilton Hotel in Guam on July 18th, 1994 to record an oral history interview with Mr. Fraser West who served with the 9th Regiment 3rd Marine Division, here in Guam during World War II. This interview is being made by the National Park Service War on the Pacific National Historical Park in conjunction with KGTF Channel 12 television. Mr. West I understand the National Park Service has given you permission to make this recording and to retain all literary and property rights deriving from that. Is that correct?

West: That is correct, sir.

Martinez: Okay, we've got that out of the way. For the record would you please spell for us your full name?

West: Fraser: F-R-A-S-E-R, E is the middle initial. West: W-E-S-T.

Martinez: What unit or ship were you in? What unit were you in during the Guam campaign?

West: I was the Commanding Officer, George Company 2nd Battalion 9th Marines, which later was detached from the 9th Marines and we were attached to the 3rd Marine Regiment.

Martinez: Could you give us your date and place of birth?

West: March 1st, 1918 Washington, DC.

Martinez: Did you grow up there?

West: No, my mother came to Reno and got a divorce and remarried my father, Dr. CW West and I was raised in Reno, Nevada from 1926 on.

Martinez: So you went to school there?

West: Yes all the public schools and the University of Nevada, which is now called the University of Nevada Reno. It was just the University of Nevada when I was there.

Martinez: What did you obtain a degree in?

West: Agriculture. Bachelor of Science in Agriculture. Isn't that a great thing to become a regular officer later? [Laughs].

Martinez: What year did you graduate university?

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West: 1940.

Martinez: 1940. So things were—World War II had already begun in Europe and it was looking gloomy in the pacific. How old were you then when you graduated?

West: I was 21 years old and we expected, because Senator Pittman at that time was a frequent guest in our home and we knew about the Yellow Pharaoh, particularly the Pacific Rim, the states of Washington, Oregon and Nevada. We knew what was going to come off ultimately, because of the Japanese.

Martinez: Newspapers were full of stories and…

West: Yes, the rest of the nation no, but on the Pacific coast we were worried about it.

Martinez: You were a young man at that time.

West: Yes.

Martinez: Did you have any illusions where you may end up?

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West: Well I had turned down an appointment going to West Point and then later I wanted to get in the Naval Air Corps and my mother was afraid of aviation at that time. Instead I enlisted in the Marine Corps.

Martinez: What year did you enlist?

West: I enlisted in October 1948 and I was the first boy out of Nevada in the First Marine Officer's Candidates class in World War II under Colonel Sheppard who later became the Commander of the Marine Corps.

Martinez: Why did you choose the Marine Corps? Was there something about it that intrigued you?

West: Well I knew somewhat about the Marine Corps, because in one summer I visited Colonel Randall, I went back to Washington DC, my real father was a newspaper man. At one time he was editor of all the Hearst papers. I went down for several weeks and played with Colonel Randall's boys who later became Marine Colonels. I was already indoctrinated in the Marine Corps.

Martinez: Where did you go to Basic Training? Or what they call boot camp?

W: The first Marine Officers Candidates Class was an experimental unit for marine officers and it was conducted at Kwaniko and General Sheppard, Colonel Sheppard then was the Commanding Officer of that unit.

Martinez: What was that like?

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West: Well actually with over 500 of us they finally commissioned 215, they tried to kill us physically. In other words if you couldn't stay in the staff physically you weren't fit to be a marine officer. Actually I think they overdid it, because a lot of the fellas that were—didn't make it, went on in the other branches of service and made excellent officers.

Martinez: But the physical nature was pretty tough. Can you give me an example of one of the toughest exercises you had to go through?

West: Well the toughest for me was—I had been in a high school fraternity and a college fraternity. Physical punishment, paddles, was a challenge to me. Anything physical. Rodeo as a young man, and the thing was—I'll relate this. I remember Captain Hudson, Louis Hudson, who later became a Brigadier General said Private First Class West front and center. Yes sir. With a full marching order. So he marched us, and I'd been a cowboy. In those times cowboys like little feet and my toes were all curled up. I had an awful time with my feet, so we marched say fifteen miles and came back. We got back, went in and my platoon sergeant and said I think you ought to look at something. So I pulled off one shoe and it was all bloody. So he went running for the Lieutenant and the CO, which was Louis and pulled off the other shoe. Well I didn't do anything for three weeks then. All the flesh came off the soles and off my toes. I would've marched until the stumps were there. That's the way the marines tested us in various things physically.

Martinez: The other part of the training is of course working and being able to operate firearms—

West: Yes.
Martinez: You probably had an affinity for that already?

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West: Well yes and then all this time I didn't do anything, I was coached by old Master Gunner's Sergeant Peachy, he was an ordinance expert. I passed all those examinations just like a tutor. So we were given all those examinations, written and oral. We went on the rifle range, you had to qualify. Then all the physical stuff they gave us, not only marching, the calisthenics and obstacle courses and bayonet training. All those things part of making a marine officer.

Martinez: What was your favorite training and what was your least favorite training out of that group?

West: Oh boy. Frankly I haven't even thought about that, that's so long ago. That's now what 54 years ago.

Martinez: Well let me maybe phrase the question this way. I've talked to a number of marines at Saipan and I asked them what their favorite activity was and some responded they loved the bayonet training and some of them didn't like the idea of getting that close to the enemy.

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West: No I don't think that bothered my particularly, I'd been around a lot of blood butchering animals and everything. I was well prepared for that. My stepfather was a surgeon and I had witnessed some operations. So that didn't bother me. So I can't really say what was my favorite or worse, I just took the whole thing in.

Martinez: After getting out of the Officer's School—the Candidate's School I suspect that they called it—you obviously completed it successfully. Where did you go from there?

West: Well then we went on to what was called the Reserve Officers Course. We were all made First Commissioner Officers in the US Marine Corps Reserve and went to that. Just before I went to that, I went skiing and went up and broke my back ski. I had been a competitive skier and I broke my back up in Vermont on the nosediving. So I was delayed, instead of going in the 4th ROC I went to the 5th ROC.

Martinez: When you come out of Officer Candidate School what was your rank at that time? Were you Second Lieutenant?

West: Second Lieutenants.
Martinez: You're laid up, you used your time productively before with the feet, what did you do with the time you were laid up--?

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West: When I was in the post-sick quarters, Colonel Sheppard since I had been in the First Candidate's Class. He used to come and give me lots of books. The Art of War, The Roots of Strategy, many many books and of course I didn't read all of them. And then I had a friend who lived across the street, they later became godparents of our oldest child. He furnished me a lot. We were getting indoctrinated all the way mentally and physically by the Marine Corps.

Martinez: Was there talk among the officers at the time what the potential adversaries were going to be and what might happen?

West: Well it looked like we'd be committed, but whether it would be in Europe or the Pacific, no one knew. We practiced amphibious landings at Kwaniko not as a Candidate, but as a Reserve Officer. That was part of our training and the old Higgin's Boats. We used to have to jump over the side. This was before they had ramps and everything.

Martinez: Fraser, where were you on December 7th, 1941? Do you recall that day?

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West: Yes I was in my Uncle's house up in Washington DC. Been out late the night before and my cousin came up in the attic where we slept and woke me up and we got on the radio naturally listening to it. I said I'd better get back to the base—get back to Kwaniko, which I did.

Martinez: You knew where Pearl Harbor was?

West: Yes sir.

Martinez: What did you think of all that?

West: Well we knew then that we were going to go to war with Japan.

Martinez: You knew probably you'd be in the middle of it?

West: Yes.

Martinez: Any apprehensions or fears at that time about that?

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West: No. I think maybe kids were raised differently. Number one if I had not volunteered I wouldn't have been able to look my stepfather in the face. Also that you wanted to do your duty—that's all of us. Whether it was the lowest private or the highest guy. We wanted to do our duty. Of course there's exceptions with people. I'd say the vast majority of marines, we're afraid not to do our duty.

Martinez: When you reported back to the base what happened at that point? The Marine Corps being mobilized?

West: Well I was still in the Reserve Offficer's Class and then subsequent to that I was ordered the FMF. I reported to K-3-5, the Company K 3rd Battalion 5th Marines. Then subsequent to that the 3rd battalion 7th Marines was the first ordered out from the west

coast in World War II. We had defense battalion on Samoa. But they didn't have enough officers. So they transferred all the company officers from the 5th Marines over to the 7th Marines so we'd have a full company going out. Our battalion had a full complement of officers K-3-7 going out. We landed first at Samoa and hung around there for a month in the harbor, marching all over the island. That was either the 6th or 8th defense battalion. Then we were ordered to go over and take Wallis Island, no one's ever heard of. That was probably supposedly the first combat landing in WWII. Actually there's only two squads of Vichy Marine there. The Marine Corps wasn't too well prepared. I can remember we kidded about it. It was a column of bunches and tent poles first. The first damn thing that came off the ships were tent poles. We were there and I had a job—to build a bomber strip there.

My job was to defend that airport with my weapons battalion. I want to relate a funny story here. They built a floating dock. You've probably heard of Colonel Luther Bigfoot Brown. Well we took turns, the officers, with working parties—bringing in supplies and food and so forth. And old Bigfoot's got his arm around me and we were in just pouring rain, just like here, he's talking to me, smoking a cigarette and he's so engrossed in his conversation telling me about whether it was Nicaragua or where it was. He walked right off the end of the floating dock. I fished him out and he without a lapse of anything he went and related the rest of the conversation to me.

Martinez: Like nothing had happened.

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West: I've told that to General Simmons that she'll be here.

Martinez: Like nothing happened.

West: Like nothing ever happened.

Martinez: And this was a hard marine that had seen combat in duty.

West: Oh yah. He'd been in Nicaragua and he had a size 14 shoe. He was very famous from Nicaragua already. He's quite a character.

Martinez: Okay we're going to go back to that—there you were on your landing, you had tent poles in first the salt and the tent poles. Was there any resistance to your landing?

West: No, no. As I recall 10, 15, 20 marines, French Vichy Marines, they were Vichy, they gave up. We went in and had an empty battalion and Bigfoot Brown was the exec of the defense battalion there.

Martinez: Do you remember the date of that? Roughly, not the exact date, but maybe the month and year?

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West: It was either late spring or early summer. We were there about three months plus or minus. Then we went over to Britty Simone. We were there about 60 days before going to Guadalcanal.

Martinez: So you went to Guadalcanal as well?

West: Yes.

Martinez: Did you go there as relief? Or did you go there as assault?

West: The whole regiment, they had landed the 1st and 5th marines there. The 7th marines came in later. We were the ones among the whole regiment came in then.

Martinez: Can you relate to me your Guadalcanal experience? Not the whole story of course, but the highlights of what it was like being at Guadalcanal? A little bit different than Wallis I suspect.

West: Oh yah, we landed and the first thing we got a naval bombardment. Of all things I ever witnessed in WWII nothing is as scary as naval bombardments. Bombing, I've had everything from small arms fire, machine gun fire, hand grenades, mortars artillery, air attack, strafings, but nothing is as scary as those old heavy guns coming. Because if you know anything about naval gunfire, what they do, they fire a salvo over, they fire salvo short, then they get the range. You don't know whether you're going to be in the middle of the next one. That's what you're worried about.

Martinez: There's kind of an eerie sound that goes with all of that right?

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West: Yes right. You can hear them coming. You like to hear them going by you.

Martinez: That's right, you'll never hear the one that doesn't go by you.

West: That's right.

Martinez: That naval bombardment that they fired on the marines was incessant of course.

West: Not every night.

Martinez: Not every night, but—

West: Then we'd have Charlie come down, reconnaissance.

Martinez: Washing Machine Charlie.

West: Yah Washing Machine Charlie.

Martinez: Well relate a little bit about that for people that don't know about Washing Machine Charlie.

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West: Well we were there and we were very short of rations. When we first got there fish heads and rice, because what happens as soon as they landed us, well first—as soon as they landed the initial first marine division, the ships had to pull out, because the Japanese had the command of the waters. When we landed the ships pulled out again for several weeks and we were short of rations except my platoon sergeant did rustle up some four eggs and I had some scramble eggs with him one night. Then we were put up on Bloody Ridge. The first infantry attack that I participated in was on Bloody Ridge.

Martinez: So that was your real first combat toe-to-toe experience?

West: Correct.

Martinez: That's—would you—that's very important, I'm sure that left some strong impressions. Can you kind of relate what that was like for you?

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West: Yah, but I'm not going to tell you all of it, because in loyalty to the Marine Corps. We had a battalion commander that was not the best. So I'm not going to relate that part or even give you his name, that's out of loyalty. The thing is that there we were untested young men, both officer and enlisted. When this attack came I had—I was directed to fire my mortars. And finally I fired 100 rounds for effect and we knew we were short of ammunition. I hated to accept that order. I delayed and delayed. Finally I was threatened with a court marshal, so I fired. I'd been sort of an irregular regular at times. So anyway I fired and later we moved down on the Turino River and I had the right flank there and established barbwire and so worth. We had tacks and Bangalore torpedoes to blow the wire out. We found those dead Japanese that I'd fired into this pocket. Myself and one man buried them all. There's nothing worse than the stench of human beings, I can remember it well.

Martinez: This battle along that ridge line is part of the Guadalcanal story?

West: That's correct.

Martinez: In fact etched in Marine Corps history and Guadalcanal history. The bullets flew fairly freely there. That combat action, must've been terrifying for the first time out. Those were seasoned veterans that were coming in.

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West: And this was a night attack. When nose and ambush would fire at us, you'd see the fire coming right at you.

Martinez: Oh you would?

West: You'd see the blue coming out at night. You remember it.

Martinez: Fascinating, but terrifying.

West: Yes.

Martinez: What were the casualties in your group?

West: We didn't take a lot, because we were in defense then. We didn't take a lot of casualties.

Martinez: But they took a lot?

West: Well we wiped out this one pocket of them and frankly I've forgotten how many was in that when they were down in the corner of the woods—and the attack is up on the hill. I got most of the mortar fire and the machine gun fire.

Martinez: For those who don't know what a mortar is and what effect it has, can you briefly describe what it can do?

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West: A mortar, both 60 millimeter and 80 millimeter, simply it's a tube, like a piece of pipe. Actually good carbon steel and with sights. It's on a tripod, so the assistant gunner presses a pin, he pulls a pin, presses it, drops it down the tube and it's gone off depending on the elevation and it drops in. It's an overhead fire, very high overhead and then drops in. You can pull mortars down to very close to your front lines. Both in the attack and in the defense. Both 60 millimeter and 80 millimeters and of course later on, there were heavier mortars were developed.

Martinez: And these take out personnel, not necessarily kill them, but maim them or wound them?

West: Just like artillery. If you get a direct hit, you're going to kill people. If not you get the shrapnel. But they also leave shells. Not so much the 60's, but the 80 ones.

Martinez: What was your experience effectively if they land in a group? What was the wounding or killing circle or ratio they could do?

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West: I've been retired now 30 years, some of those little technical facts—

Martinez: Would it be safe to say that within 15 feet of point center?

West: Oh yes, right yes.

Martinez: From the Guadalcanal experience, the United States now is slowly moving forward after winning that battle. Where do you go from there?

West: Well first we were all of us had been out early—were promoted to Captain. We had in K-Company one James O'Shamley who was killed on Peleliu. As I recall three of us made Captain and I turned down going back to the states twice and finally said you got to go. They need experienced officers and you're probably going to come out again. So I went back

and joined the 9th regiment with General Sheppard. He was now the commanding officer of the 9th Marine Regiment. First in Regimental weapons, which disappointed me, because I'd been to artillery school, he wanted me to train the 75, they're mounted on half tracks. Well I got them trained and then he insisted that everybody go into scout sniper school and I've got a humorous thing on that if you wanted me to tell it. But anyway—

Martinez: Sure.

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West: I ended up, then I was sent to George Company 2nd battalion 9th Marines. From there I went to New Zealand and then to Guadalcanal. Geary Bundschu was my exec, then when he made Captain, he and Patterson, that's when he went over and took command of A Company 1st battalion 3rd marines and as you know the story of Guam why Bundschu Ridge was unfortunate.

Martinez: What's the story you'd like to relate about the sniper?

West: What's the sniper?

Martinez: I'm sorry, what's the story you were going to relate to me—the humorous story you said prior to this?

West: Let's see, I've lost my thought now on that. I was going to tell you, unless you can reverse the tape here. What was I relating to? Oh scout sniper school! I think this is the reason why Colonel Sheppard gave me a rifle company. I went to this scout sniper school and there was only three experienced combat officers in the 9th marines—the CO, Sheppard, another captain and myself. He insisted that we go off to scout sniper school. So after about five days of harassment and physically and I had been over one of these walls and had really gotten my tendon all bruised, and I'm walking around all padded up and so forth. So we're supposed to have the last night as a bivouac. So I told all these boys, I don't know there were 50 or 60 of us, something like that. Just casual from various units of the 9th marines. I said I want you all to take some extra clothing in your pack. So they gave us

an area we were supposed to defend that night. I said the most obvious place is not the most tactical, but let's—Bivouac and this flat area among these oaks, where there were leaves. I said okay now you guys pack everything up and leave in your spare uniform. Then we'll get up on the ridge and they'll be in here 11 or 12, 1 o'clock and then you go down, I want you to beat the hell out of all of them, which we did. So the next morning I'm on report to the CO of this camp and the head of the school. I said well they'd been harassing the hell out of us, which they didn't need to. And I was an experienced combat officer. We just show what the hell it is. I told these boys, I said do anything this—anything goes. Being good marines, they carried out my orders. So when I put on report, this Lieutenant Colonel wasn't very happy with me. General Sheppard got me in, he said what the hell did you do Fraser? I said well I related a story, they'd harassed us for about five days. I figured I'd better give them a lesson for subsequent people going after, they didn't need to act that way.

Martinez: Fraser when you say they harassed you—could you—

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West: Well both mentally and physically. They gave us again too much physically and a lot of verbal stuff, a lot of marines will dress people down. Even my wife says you marines, you're sarcastic in a lot of things and that's—

Martinez: They have colorful language there—

West: Oh yes, I won't relate all that. Well anyway. So Colonel Sheppard related all this. Unfortunately Bundschu had come right out of basic school and they gave him Company as a Second Lieutenant with no experience which was unfavorable for him. It was a little touch and go when I first took over as a Captain and he was still a Second Lieutenant.

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As I related the story to Colonel Sheppard he just smiled. He said well you're a little rough. Yes sir. So a couple of days later he said you go down and straighten out Company G, which I did.

Martinez: There's probably a lot of events that lead up to Guam and unfortunately in the short time we have, we can't cover them all. But is there one high point before coming to Guam, you'd like to talk about?

West: Well I'll give you an example. Sometimes you have to maintain discipline and Obi knows this, who's with me in George Company at Camp Pendleton. When I first took over we had a night problem. Bundschu was too close to the man. I felt the company out to go on a night problem and we had about a third of the company. So in those days you asked people whether they wanted to accept your company punishment or see the old man. So I went up to see the battalion commander Jess Hankins who'd been in WWI and said Colonel we've got to do something. Either it's them or me. So I gave a lot of them company punishment and some of them a couple of them went over the hill never came back, which was fine. The rest of them from then on when I said something they knew I meant it. I never had to exert any authority after that. Those men I was never threatened by any man in that outfit.

Martinez: Pretty loyal.

West: Yes. [Crying]. Okay.

Martinez: Fraser. In preparation for the landings here in Guam. There was new amphibious crafts that—

West: Yes.

Martinez: Were now being used. Did you take that training in Maui, or where was all that taking place?

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West: We got most of that landing in New Zealand. Then in Guadalcanal we made practice landings. The first LVTs did not have a ramp. We had to come over the sides. First we used

the landing craft vehicle personnel boats. They had a ramp. The first amphibian tractors didn't, then by the time we got to—after Boganville, we landed in LCVPs on Boganville and our battalion was way on the left flank of that one. When we got to Guam we'd off load off of the APAs and we—I was on the present Jackson about seven times in WWII, which the last time before we came here we were 50 or 60 days at sea, we were reserved for Saipan. So—

Martinez: But you didn't go into Saipan?

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West: No. The whole division was floating reserve. They found they didn't need. So they had just really pounded Guam. They thought that—

Martinez: Based on their experience in Saipan?

West: Yes right. So when we landed the procedure was to go down the landing nets, the cargo nets, get into a boat, you'd rendez-vous, then the tractors would pick you up and take you to shore. Then they'd make another trip back and pick up somebody else. The 3rd battalion 9th range was first to shore and then I've forgotten frankly whether we were the 2nd or 3rd battalion. I think we were the 2nd, but that's beyond me. I could look it up in the records.

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West: Right after the war, you could still tell everything about it, but from then on it was too built up.

Martinez: Okay, going back a little and discussing a landing craft is a very important part of this story of course. Going back a little. There had been experiences here in the Marianas that the Marine Corps was now taking into account. Certainly the Saipan campaign, which was an extremely costly affair had shown that naval bombardment was going to have to be increased and even then the chances are that you're hoping for the most effectiveness, but

sometimes that doesn't occur. Here you are your unit in reserve now is committed. What kind of preparations and plans were related to you as an officer in charge of this?
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West: Well we were all—all officers carried a map case. And we were given maps. The maps we had on Wallis Island Guadalcanal were very insufficient, however, because Guam was a territory since the Spanish American War of 1898, or the conclusion of the Spanish American War. We had excellent maps. They knew what was to be expected. And of course because Tumon Bay was probably more heavily defended, that's why we didn't land—we landed between Asan and Adelup Point. And the Brigade even was less defended on further south.

Martinez: So intelligence had told you that this was probably a good way to go.

West: Yes and I don't know. It was just like coast watches on Bougainville, we got a lot of information then when we landed on Bougainville—or prior to Bougainville. I feel sure we probably had from the loyal Chamorrans that we probably had as good intelligence as you could get. We had good intelligence.

Martinez: One of the questions that I'm intrigued by and I haven't seen it really discussed in the history books, but maybe you could talk about it—It's obvious you had a civilian population here and the experience at Saipan they had moved people or had interwove them in defensive units. What were your instructions as an officer to try to liberate these people or differentiate between them and the enemy? Is that impossible to do in these circumstances?

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West: Well first of all when you start bombarding the beach both by naval air, primary naval air and what was naval air here and my ship—you're not—civilians are going to flee that area. Your enemy has to stay, if he's to defend that ground, he's going to stay. He might pull back from something and then come back into the trenches or out of their pillboxes in the trenches and so forth. So we didn't worry too much about that. But from the atrocities

from the navies on both Guadalcanal and primarily in Boganville, I believed in taking prisoners. A lot of my fellow marine officers did not. I always felt that if you can take prisoners and get some information, you're going to save lives in the long run. That was not the popular thought, particularly among junior officers. Obi will tell you about finding three of the Chamorrans with their hands behind their back and their necks sliced. So the thing is the atrocities that the Japanese pulled on the people here, a lot of it we didn't know at that time. We thought they'd be incarcerated the men and the women and the children would probably be at home. We weren't worried too much about that. We were briefed on it.

Martinez: Your primary concern was the objective.

West: The objective, right.

Martinez: So let's talk about that—

West: For speech headline—

Martinez: Specifically, for people that are unaware of your activities. Obviously you sit down and you do your planning and you brief what your objectives are. What was your objective on this landing?

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West: The force beach headline was included up this ridge from Adelup Point, I'm going from left to right on up to Fonte Hill, now Nimitz Hill. All around and with Asan Point and going up that way and further going to try to link up to the first provisional brigade, which was on the left flank. The army was on the right and then the Marines. I took a combat patrol out several miles, didn't find anything except the story I told you before about the poor old caribou.

Martinez: Well we'll talk a little bit about that.

West: I went—I was on the right flank division and my company was on the right next to the ocean, astride that road. I wasn't across the road, we were up over that hill and then General Wilson, Captain Wilson's company is on the left along that ridge.
Martinez: And it's obviously the Japanese defense line is going to be there and your job is to break it and drive them out.

West: Yes

Martinez: Now were you to drive them a certain direction or just drive them out?

West: No we had to reach our objective. Our objective, the force beach headline was going to go clear to join up with the first provisional brigade.

Martinez: So the link up.

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West: We made the objective the first day. That wasn't the final beach headline, but we made that with Asan Point and swinging around to Adelup Point, division made that. In our battalion after the initial landing was committed on the attack on the right. I had one platoon pick up a few stragglers. The 1st battalion and the 3rd battalion landed and they cleaned out Asan Point, but there's always a few people behind.

Martinez: What was the resistance like?

West: There were people in trenches and everything. We suffered casualties. It was light resistance I'd say. Most of our casualties were coming from artillery and motor fire.

Martinez: Not friendly fire, but hostile fire?

West: No hostile fire.

Martinez: The ridgeline that you were going to move up was a very rugged ridgeline and not only that but came under fire. Can you describe—

West: You mean on the right of the division or when we moved over to Fonte Hill ?
Martinez: Well I'm primarily talking about when you moved over and helped those fellows out over on that side.

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West: Well there was scattered resistance there. The Japanese were smart, they were good tactical soldiers. They had been pulled back into the reverse slope to take protection. They were primarily using artillery and motors on that. From their higher ground machine guns. Then they had these banzai attacks at night.

Martinez: Let's talk about that. When you and I were standing up over the overlook, you looked over that point and pointed and said that's where those banzai attacks were. And you looked long and hard at that area. So it must've been something.

West: Well we were pulled out. Our battalion was supposedly, we feel we were the best. General Cushman was an excellent leader. So the division pulled him out and we marched from way out there towards the PD Navy yard over to join up. We went up through—to link up with the 1st Battalion 3rd Marines. When we got up in this point in that grassy knoll, I pointed out we launched the attacker there, Cushman, and when we climbed up there here was Captain Patterson, the only officer left with 20-30 men out of A Company with Geary Bundschu. So he launched E Company on the right in the attack. And George Company in reserve. Bob always liked to keep me in reserve, I guess, he had his reasons. And you're supposed to make the end run around. So then I don't know, it was 3:30-4 o'clock, late in the afternoon, he committed me and he pointed out the objective and I took an asmuss on it and I attacked in that direction. That's when it went up and it's written up in this book, you know about Blue Wilson and I going around the hill. I stopped in this brush up there. It was really thick and Lou went out in reconnaissance from his left flank and we met around this rock and looked down upon thousands of Japanese down there. Then—

Martinez: That must've been a little scary.

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West: Yes it was. But we looked at each other—

Martinez: These Japanese were staging right there?

West: In groups. We weren't a tactical unit, we looked over there both of us and had a good view down there. It just was—well some people may say it was bravado and luck, but we knew we could see around this big rock if we get there both of us. Unbeknownst to each other. When we got out there and looked. Then I decided to come back and that from Nimitz Hill I met Admiral Christiansen and he said do you mind if we look, there's a clearing and I'll swear it's the same one, it's now not completely overgrown and to get back I said we've got to go back a different way Lou. So I said you remember basketball, he said yup. I said we're going to do a grapevine and I don't know whether Lou was right behind me or enter my runner PFC Chefling and his runner and we did this and we were fired on both sides and none of us got hit and got back to our own companies. Then Bob Cushman.

Martinez: So you did this basketball weave pattern?

West: Yes.

Martinez: And made it back under fire?

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West: Yes under fire. So we'd gotten back to our companies and then Bob told me link up with Lou. By that time it's getting late in the day. About this time he said I'm sending you some tanks. So a platoon, it's a C Company tank platoon, I finally in San Antonio met one of the tank drivers. He's a Corporal last year. They came up and they had ammunition loaded all of them, hand grenades and some water, because we're always running short of water in combat. So I said he reported—I said what are your orders? He said direct support. I said what are you going to do? He said well we're supposed to unload all this ammunition. At

that time the strategy or the policy was that the tanks would not stay in the front lines with the infantry at night. I said Lieutenant you're in direct support, I cannot order you, but if you don't stay here tonight with us, I don't know whether we're going to be here in the morning, quietly, I didn't want anyone to hear me. So he stayed.

Martinez: It's because you had seen that group of Japanese and what they were about to do, right?

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West: Yes exactly. So Lou Wilson and I established a CT together, very unorthodox to have and finally we—after two or three banzai attacks Lou said I think we better separate. But the first banzai attack I can well remember. Lou's legs and I'm facing like over here and Lou's over here legs. And we were shivering, scared to death.

Martinez: And what are banzai attacks? There's a lot of racket and the Japanese are they shouting at you?

West: They're shouting insults, but it sounds like—something in Japanese are you ready on the left, are you ready on the right? Then here they come. You can see the swords flashing.

Martinez: At night?

West: At night.

Martinez: And there's a lot of yelling going on?

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West: A lot of yelling.

Martinez: Gunfire sporadic and then it ceased?

West: And I told the guys shoot low and use hand grenades as much as possible.

Martinez: Now are you guys entrenched?
West: No in foxholes. We had—when Lou and I linked up and he bent back a little from up there off this rocky knoll and we linked up and dug foxholes. My runner said I'll dig yours. I said I've got to get all the men squared away and that was my deal with him. If he digged he didn't have to come with me.

Martinez: And what kind of weapon were you carrying?

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West: I carried a carbine and a 45. The reason that most all company officers carried a carbine was so you wouldn't be identified as an officer. If you just carried a pistol we knew from experience in Guadalcanal you're a marked man.

Martinez: So do you order your company to fix bayonets at that point? Are they fixing bayonets that night?

West: No, no. I don't think I recall ever fixing bayonets, because we're in defense. A few probably did, and we had knives. I can remember one guy when Lou and I was there, Japanese stepped in the middle and the back and went on—it was curious that night—

Martinez: They stepped on the back and went on?

West: Went on—anyway that night, the tank I had behind us and I said Lieutenant I'll protect your tanks. I'll put infantry around them, which I did. The tank I had in the rear, back with my mortars and Lieutenant Puponus. They killed more Japs than we did I think in the front lines that night. We had as many behind us as in front of us.

Martinez: They had just broken through?

West: Yes.

Martinez: Or did they get around you?
West: They had broken through, because it's not a perimeter. We just had one long thin line and we connected up—Lou had connected up with one platoon of Captain Peterson who was killed that afternoon. Had one platoon, so you had two rifle companies, mine and Lou's and that one platoon.

Martinez: How many men are we talking about here?

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West: Well I had—you went in with 221 men and 7 officers. I had all my officers except my machine gun officer, Lieutenant Golsin was killed that night. Lou had suffered some casualties. And Obi can tell you about F Company, I'm just talking about George Company now.

Martinez: Right. How many Japanese do you think came through there that night?

West: Well I don't know. I've heard it said that the next day or subsequent to that when they finally got to the top of Fonte Ridge that we'd killed 600 or 800. Our battalion and this was a body count. We weren't interested in body counts. But after a series of these attacks, we were running short of ammunition. Well if you read this book I said Lou we'd better get some more ammunition for these guys and hand grenades. I went to the tanks and they still had some ammunition on there. I don't know what it weighs a box of grenades, but I loaded myself with a box of grenades and filled my jacket full of hand grenades and crossed with some vandaliers of ammunition, both machine gun and—it's amazing how strong you are when you have to be. I distributed that ammunition not only through G Company, clear over to Eddie, Major Eddie, here on the island, his platoon was on the right. Clear over to him and Peterson's platoon, because we knew we were going to be attacked again. So this went on and I knew we'd have to get some help. So I climbed in one of these tanks and that's written up by Gaily in here and cranked the thing, got on the naval gunfire circuit. Couldn't reach anybody. So I'll never forget it. I hoped to hell I run into this guy. I ran into

my nurse, that's another story, after I was wounded. That's a cute story. I remember the cute things as well as the other things. So I got on this thing and so and so said who are you? I said Major Fraser Easy West, George Company 2nd—you're breaking security. Security hell, the Japs know exactly where we are. I want to get through to my battalion commander. I want some support. So then he knew I was serious. And then he said where are you? Man then as I'm sweating in that tank in the humidity and we had the maps with the m-square system, if you've ever seen it in your historical research. Okay, trying to figure out, because you're not supposed to bring naval gunfire closer than 1200 yards. Well I brought it in to about 600 or 800, I'm really sweating. I knew all these thousands of Japanese over this damn hill. I figured if I could get them in there, between the volleys and star shells that we're going to get a hell of a lot of these people. Course that night they gave us so many star shells, it was just light of day most of the night. Then the debris from those star shells had fallen down on us.

Martinez: Phosphorous right?

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West: Yes, we never got any men hurt out of that. So then finally after a series of these last couple of banzai attacks before dawn I told Mac, I didn't relate how Mac—I'm carrying Mac up to this point, because I'll tell you that story in a minute. I said I've got to get two hours sleep. I woke up in the gray dawn. I needed it, because I hadn't eaten or drunk much and I was just damn near physically exhausted. So I got my two hours sleep during two banzai attacks. [Laughter]. No you've got to just divorce your mind if you're well balanced. I think I'm still a well balanced person, hopefully. So then the next morning Cushman ordered me to attack through Lou Wilson his company and that's when we started attacking up the hill.

Let me tell you about McClellan and why I carried him. When we landed two things. One was that I just happened to look over and he brought company headquarters and the weapons platoon with him. I happened to look over and this Amtrak either hit a mine or a shell hit it at the same time. I look up at it, Mac's about six feet in the air, came down, obvious concussion. I said Mac, you alright? He doesn't answer me right away. So then I have the decision to make shall I turn him in, tell him to go back or carry him. Well we

carried him and he's coming out of the thing more and more everyday. But he had obvious shellshock.

Martinez: So I suspected if you talked to him, he wouldn't recall a lot of this?

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West: No he didn't. Then Mac went on with the company after exec, he was my exec. He got a Navy Cross and a yule.

Martinez: One of the things I wanted to talk to you about and looking back 50 years this was a brutal and vicious war. The enemy was as you have pointed out was formidable. What is your impression now after 50 years of the Japanese Soldiers you faced here and has that changed or been altered over time? Has that somewhat been—

West: Well naturally time has altered, but they were good dedicated soldiers, there's no doubt about it. But they were not as flexible as Americans. Particularly in the Marine Corps. We train, if everybody is killed the last fire team leader is going to take over. They're not, most armies in the world aren't trained that way. Just the Marine Corps, whether it's for the Corps or what, we want to train people so somebody can take over. Like Obi had been an enlisted man. Nola and Kranser were two of my sergeants from Guam, they got field commissions as 2nd Lieutenants. We had some excellent men. Let me go back one thing. We had an experienced WWI officer Colonel Craig who later became Lieutenant General and he came up with me what was going on Fraser. He got down in the hole and when you're in a hole and there's one palm tree there and he looked around on the left hand side and I said Colonel if you don't mind look around the right hand side, because I don't want to get shot right here. He said whoops I've forgotten my basics, which he carried out as a request for me. He was a great officer, great leader and he went on to—no he was relieved after Guam went back. I think he'd been selected to be LG about that time.

Martinez: Just getting back to this Japanes thing and I'll put that aside, how do you feel about the Japanese after these 50 years?

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West: Well I have mixed emotions. I think you have to make friends with your enemies, whether the German or the Japanese, however, if I'm introduced to anybody I'm going to be friendly. But I just assume not be apart of that Japanese-American ceremony that they're going to have here.

Martinez: That's just your personal—

West: That's my personal feeling.

Martinez: When you look back at Guam and your experience, because I suspect that the one thing, you were wounded here.

West: Yes.

Martinez: And how do you feel about Guam on this 50th anniversary and why did you come back?

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West: Well Obi and I talked and we thought we'd like to come back, see the island, refight the war and see what progress has been made. And there's been tremendous progress. Primarily because of the Japanese, so that's a good plus for them, coming down here and their businesses and these hotels and tourism and so forth. So that's the primary reason he and I came.

Martinez: When we were up on the hill and we encountered you, you were quite surprised to see that all this battleground that you and the men you led had come across was now a National Park, a National Historical Park. What's your feeling about that, that the National Park Service is here?

West: I think it's great. It's just like Gettysburg, anything.

Martinez: Did you ever think the battlefields that you fought on would be held as historical parks?

West: No, that really surprised both of us. I think it's great for the young people. I've been a history buff all my life. I think that's great.

Martinez: What's the lesson of history here for the young people?

West: It can happen again. It can happen again.

Martinez: Your career was distinguished, you served your country well. When you retired you retired as—

West: A Colonel.

Martinez: And under—I know you don't brag about these things, but for the record, what were your citations that you received?

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West: Well I got a Presidential Unit Citation from Guadalcanal as part of the 1st Marine division. And here the 3rd Marines and the 2nd battalion 9th Marines received a Presidential Unit Citation, because I was wounded I got a Purple Heart. I could've had another one, I had shrapnel in my back. Then I got a silver star, I was recommended for Navy Cross. There were four of us in the battalion. My friend who was on the board said you can only have three Navy Crosses, so I was the low man on the totem pole. It's under review again. The thing about it, when I said things can happen again—look at North Korea today. The armed services are very expensive and it really bothers me since I stayed in for 24 years and I told you why I got out, or I think I did. The thing is it could happen again. I saw the Marine Corps when I was on recruiting duty after WWII in St. Louis and

Lou Wilson's in New York City. What they did then, the Marine Corps took decorated officers and put them all around the country. Recruiting was tough right after WWII obviously. The thing is whether it's North Korea or some other country and all this mix up in Africa, Middle East and marines pride themselves on being the first to fight. It can happen. I hope the Marine Corps, we're getting less percentage on this draw down, 185,00 180-something, but I saw us go down to 90,000. And Korea came along, we had to go right back up. We're a lot smarter with pre-positioning all of our supplies and everything, like what happened with Desert Storm and Diego Island, PX Kelly putting a lot of stuff out, pre-position. But the same thing unfortunately in the wars in history—wars repeat themselves. It seems like mankind just never learns. That's what worries me.

Martinez: You said coming back to Guam you and your friend Obiyam next door, you came back to kind of refight the war. Why do veterans come back to find the people that meant so much to them?

West: Yes.

Martinez: Those are the men that they fought with, there's a bond in friendship that unless you're in combat you'll never know. It's been described in books, is that accurate?

West: Yes. Well I have some other men that are coming on the tour. John Foley and the tank commander, men out of my company, Albert West, another West, I don't know exactly who's coming, because we didn't sign up on this tour. Being Scotch we came a little cheaper through a wholesaler. [Laughter]. So anyway you do and that bond is—Obi and I were together at Camp Pendleton and New Zealand and training on and off in Guadalcanal and Boaganville. So we've been together and we're just 75 miles apart. We belong in the 3rd Marine Division Association. And Puponus does who's my weapons platoon commander. So we get together from time to time. I've been to quite a few of the Associations, I'm a life member and also the 1st Marine Division. We get together on these things. It's comradeship. That's what I miss about the Marine Corps more than anything. It's comradeship.

Martinez: The 50th anniversary of WWII is now passing and as the war intensified of course here it was the beginning of the end, but it was obvious we were moving closer to Japan. I suspect that when you look back at those days, they don't seem like 50 years ago.

West: No.

Martinez: But what is the legacy of WWII in your view? Besides it could happen again, what about the young men of your generation?

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West: Well probably we were the last generation except those that went on to Korea that was our duty and we had a common enemy just like the army in Europe and the marines in the Pacific and the army in the Pacific, because the army is just as important as the Marine Corps. We had a job to do and the sooner we could get it over with the better. So when you committed people to the attack, they didn't think anything else except getting the job done, that was it. We were trained, we knew we were going to take casualties, but it was one of those things you have to do.

Martinez: Is there anything that perhaps in the closing of this interview, it's gone by so quickly, you'd be surprised the time has peeled away here. Is there anything you'd like to mention in closing that maybe we didn't touch upon?

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West: Well hopefully if in the future some young people see this—war is hell. [Crying]. I hope they don't have to go through it. But as I said before, history unfortunately repeats itself and the US should be prepared. And armed forces are expensive, I think we need more joint efforts at the DOD, but I think you have to preserve the traditions, which we in the Marine Corps feel deeply about especially combat experienced people feel deeper about that than other people I'm sure, because—and we should prepare the youth better in the schools. The older you get, regardless of political, whichever political party you belong to, there's not much discipline. When I was in grammar school you stood up when you were

talked to or recited. It seems like we have less discipline among our young people today. If they look at these things it takes discipline to win a war, lots of it. It seems like our country now, we're litigious society. Everybody wants to sue somebody else. Things like that, which were unheard of when I grew up—it's just like now any complaints they want to go to the top. We were trained in Marine Corps, you don't ever talk or write to a Congressman. That was forbidden verbal, nothing written. You didn't try to get anybody—

Martinez: In closing Colonel, I'd just like to thank you for this interview. You came here with a friend and you related a lot of stories. Can you just in closing tell us what this friend Obi means to you and what your experience was?

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West: Obi is a highly unusual person, very dedicated—he was a very dedicate Marine an outstanding infantry officer and as I said before he was decorated. Outstanding family man with his four kids, worked hard, came out of the Marine Corps with no education except high school—climbed poles as PGNE, got out of that management and he spent I guess 30 years or better with PGNE and he was in management and he's retired like I am, only I have more cattle to take care of.

Martinez: He retired as a--?

West: He was the district manager at Mariposa.

Martinez: And in the Marine Corps he retired as a--?

West: He got out. He was a Captain, well he may tell you the story. He was about ready to make Captain and didn't—First Lieutenant. I won't relate a story that he's a little resentful, he might point it out. He—because he was combat decorated he was finally retired as Lieutenant Colonel Marine Corps Reserve. He did not keep up his reserve time like Lieutenant Pupomus whose Lieutenant Colonel Marine Corps retired too.

Martinez: It seems to me that you have a great deal of respect for him.

West: Oh utmost.

Martinez: I watched you two walking around over there and it was really something. I'm a younger person and I'm of course the children of the war that you fought, a recipient of all of that and a grateful one. To watch you two walk around and look at that battlefield together. I don't think you would have come here with anybody else perhaps.

West: No, we wanted Pupomus to come with us and there's some other people in the 3rd Marine Division Association, but you're closer to your officers than naturally the men. Doesn't mean I'm not close to him, but Obi's special to me.

01:03:55

Martinez: Well on behalf of the National Park Service, we'd like to thank you for this interview today. We hope that the 50th anniversary observance here, which is to you veterans, is one that will make it worthwhile for your long visit. That this tape will go a long way to having young people in the future understand the experience—

[END OF INTERVIEW]